

2026-2027 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

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<https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

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Case 1: Clocked out of Opportunity

Shanaya is a sophomore at Ridge Academy, a boarding school that draws students from 25 states and 17 countries and also enrolls a small number of day students, including Shanaya. She lives fifteen miles from campus. Her parents have struggled financially and recently began working early morning shifts at the local hospital leaving Shanaya responsible for getting her two younger siblings ready in the morning and walking them to their own school before taking public transportation to Ridge Academy. This rarely goes smoothly. As a result, Shanaya, a scholarship student, frequently arrives late.

Ridge Academy prides itself on raising “disciplined leaders” and considers discipline a core value. Its strict attendance policy even imposes severe consequences for tardy arrivals. Shanaya, who is now rarely on time, is on Academic Probation and risks losing her scholarship. She speaks with Mr. Furth who teaches her first period Pre-Calculus Class and asks to make up materials she has missed. Mr. Furth, himself a former boarding student at Ridge Academy, sympathizes with her situation but responds that the attendance policy applies equally to all students, regardless of individual circumstances. What’s more, he argues, employers in the real world won’t give a pass to chronically late employees: it’s just as well that students learn to be on time.

Distressed with the prospect of losing the scholarship she has worked so hard to earn, Shanaya turns to Ms. Young, the head of Financial Aid, who has supported Shanaya throughout her time at Ridge Academy. Ms. Young grew up in the same town as Shanaya and in a similar socioeconomic situation. They have developed a close relationship. Shanaya views Ms. Young as a role model and mentor. Ms. Young is torn. She has the authority to make an exception for Shanaya but knows that doing so would set a precedent and could open a “can of worms.” After all, some families pay considerably more than Shanaya’s to attend Ridge Academy and would jump at the injustice of setting a double standard for scholarship students.

Match Questions

1. Since Ridge Academy has authorized Ms. Young to make exceptions to scholarship policies, would it be fair for her to factor her personal relationship with Shanaya into her decision? Why or why not?
2. Would the threat of future complaints justify Ms. Young choosing not to grant Shanaya an exception? Why or why not?
3. Would it be fair to boarding students, who have their own challenges to deal with, to provide an exception for Shanaya? Why or why not?

Study Questions

1. How far should schools accommodate students for circumstances that are actually beyond their control?
2. If a private school is built around particular core values, should students who cannot abide by those values simply go elsewhere for school?